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mark

A DOUBLE-EDGED BIBLE STUDY

TH1NK:**LIFECHANGE**



The Navigators is an international Christian organization. Our mission is to reach, disciple, and equip people to know Christ and to make Him known through successive generations. We envision multitudes of diverse people in the United States and every other nation who have a passionate love for Christ, live a lifestyle of sharing Christ's love, and multiply spiritual laborers among those without Christ.

NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators. NavPress publications help believers learn biblical truth and apply what they learn to their lives and ministries. Our mission is to stimulate spiritual formation among our readers.

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introduction to TH1NK: LifeChange

Double-Edged and Ready for Action

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

a reason to study

Studying the Bible is more than homework. It is more than reading a textbook. And it is more than an opportunity for a social gathering. Like Hebrews suggests, the Bible knows us, challenges us, and yes, judges us. Like a double-edged sword, it's sharp enough to cut through our layers of insecurity and pretense to change our lives forever.

Deep down, isn't that what we want—to actually *experience* God's power in our lives, through Scripture? That's what TH1NK: LifeChange is all about. The purpose of this Bible study is to connect you intimately with God's Word. It can change you, not only intellectually, but also spiritually, emotionally, maybe even physically. God's Word is that powerful.

The psalmist wrote,

*What you say goes, God,
and stays, as permanent as the heavens.
Your truth never goes out of fashion;
it's as up-to-date as the earth when the sun comes
up. . . .
If your revelation hadn't delighted me so,
I would have given up when the hard times came.
But I'll never forget the advice you gave me;
you saved my life with those wise words.
Save me! I'm all yours.
I look high and low for your words of wisdom.
The wicked lie in ambush to destroy me,
but I'm only concerned with your plans for me.
I see the limits to everything human,
but the horizons can't contain your commands.*

(PSALM 119:89-90,92-96, *THE MESSAGE*)

Do you notice the intimate connection the psalmist has with God *because* of the greatness of the Word? He trusts God, he loves Him, and his greatest desire is to obey. But the only way he knows how to do any of this is because he knows God's voice, God's words.

the details

Each TH1NK: LifeChange study covers one book of the Bible so you can concentrate on its particular, essential details. Although every study exclusively covers a different book, there are common threads throughout the series. Each study will do the following:

1. Help you understand the book you're studying so well that it affects your daily thinking
2. Teach valuable Bible study skills you can use on your own to go even deeper into God's Word
3. Provide a contextual understanding of the book, offering historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes
4. Allow you to understand the message of the book as a whole
5. Demonstrate how God's Word can transform you into a bona fide representative of Jesus

Every week, plan on spending about thirty to forty-five minutes on your own to complete the study. Then get together with your group. Depending on the amount of time it takes, you can either go through a whole or a half lesson each week. If you do one lesson per week, you'll finish the study in three months. But it's all up to you.

the structure

The twelve lessons include the following elements:

Study. First you'll study the book by yourself. This is where you'll answer questions, learn cultural and biographical information, and ask God some questions of your own.

Live. After you've absorbed the information, you'll want to look in a mirror—figuratively, that is. Think about your life in the context of what you've learned. This is a time to be honest with yourself and with God about who you are and how you are living.

Connect. You know that a small-group study time isn't just for hanging out and drinking soda. A small group provides accountability and support. It's one thing to say to yourself, *I'm really going to work on this* and entirely another thing to say it to a group of your friends. Your friends can support your decisions, encourage you to follow through, and pray for you regularly. And vice versa.

In your group, you'll want to talk with each other about what you discovered on your own: things that went unanswered, things that challenged you, and things that changed you. Use the guidance in this section to lead your discussion. After that, pray for each other. This section will always provide targeted prayer topics for you and your group.

Go deeper. Thirsty for more? Just can't get enough? Then use the guidance in this section to explore even deeper the vastness of Scripture. It's similar to extra credit, for all the overachievers who love to learn.

Memory verse of the week. Did a particular verse make you think? Is there a verse you can't get out of your head? Write it down and memorize it. Allow God's Word to permanently brand itself in your head and your heart.

Notes. At the end of each chapter, there are some pages for notes. Use them to write notes from your group discussions, to ask questions of God or yourself, to write important verses and observations—or anything you want.

now go!

You are now ready to experience the Bible and the God of the Bible in an intense new way. So jump in, head first. Allow the double-edged sword of Scripture to pierce your mind, your heart, your life.

Introduction to Mark

Jesus, according to Mark

The gospel of Mark tells about Jesus. That's it. Like the three other Gospels, this book gives us an insider's account of Jesus' ministry – who He was, what He did, how He loved, why He died, that He rose and saved humanity. Mark's gospel is considered the most straightforward of the four: he dives right into Jesus' story, which may explain why it's the shortest gospel. Mark wanted us to understand that God isn't just some unapproachable Being in the sky, but that He spent a grueling human life on this watery planet to make it possible for us to be with Him. He came to give us abundant life – here, now, forever.

Mark's gospel allows us, in a way, to spend time with Jesus, to walk with Him in the cities and to go where He goes. As we study this book, we dive deeper into Jesus' story. We go from hanging out with Him to actually asking Him questions, conversing with Him. This gospel ushers us into the life of our Savior, and it can transform our lives.

Want to be more like Jesus? Get to know Him. Study this gospel and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into a new experience.

the setting

Most likely, Mark was written by John Mark, a first-century Jewish follower of Christ. Because he went by his second name, Mark (or Marcus), scholars infer he was probably a Roman citizen, like the apostle Paul. Mark was pretty well-connected; his mother, Mary (not Jesus' mom, or Mary Magdalene, but another Mary altogether), was a good friend of Peter, and his cousin, Barnabas, accompanied Paul on his missionary adventures. These connections would have fed him firsthand information about Jesus' life and ministry. The late scholar, T. W. Manson, theorized that Mark was Peter's interpreter during his ministry in Rome.

Even with all these connections, it's unclear if Mark was an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. But if Mark truly is John Mark, as many believe, he spent at least *some* time with Jesus (Mark 14:51-52 seems to imply he did). Either way, when Mark wrote, he knew what he was talking about.

mark's audience

Modern scholars almost unanimously agree that Mark's was the earliest of the four Gospels. He probably wrote the book after Peter died, but before Jerusalem fell, between A.D. 64 and 70. Mark likely wrote in Rome, but some say his book could have been written in Egypt or Syria.

It is clear, however, that Mark was written for Gentiles, or non-Jews. Mark revealed certain signs to point us toward this conclusion; for example, he explained Jewish practices, which presumes his intended audience did not already know them. Also, Mark translated Aramaic words (the Jewish language of the time) found in the text. If he were writing to Jewish people, he obviously wouldn't have needed to do that.

mark's purpose

Mark wanted to explain to his non-Jewish readers how his own people rejected Jesus – the Jewish Messiah. The Jews expected a glorious warrior king. What they got was an apparent “average Joe,” a carpenter, who hung out with company not fit for a king and spoke about atypical, controversial things. It didn't make a lot of sense to a people desperately waiting for their hero to arrive. Yet supposedly they knew their Scriptures backward and forward. If they did, they should have expected their Messiah to be born of a humble birth and to live a humble, suffering life. The prophets predicted it all. But many Jews missed that part of the story.

Mark grounded his gospel in history, using trusted evidence to ensure that readers know (1) this message is true, even if the Jewish nation rejected it and (2) the gospel of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises through and to Israel. Christ's story can't be understood apart from its historical context.

the history of good news

Gospel is an Old English word that means “good news.” It comes from the Greek word *euangelion*. *Eu* means “good” and *angelion* means “message.” You can probably tell that's where we get the words *evangelist* and *angel*.

In case you encounter this later, it's important to note that Mark, Matthew, and Luke are often lumped together (and are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels). John is considered a separate gospel because, though the Synoptic Gospels closely resemble each other, John wrote a unique account.

While modern scholars generally believe Mark was written first, second-century Christian writers thought Matthew and Luke must have been written first because they are longer books. To them, Mark was just a condensed version of the real thing.

But evidence points to Mark as the first gospel:

Matthew and Luke, while longer, contain almost the entire contents of Mark. Only thirty-one of Mark's 678 verses do not show up in either Matthew or Luke.

Matthew and Luke often smooth the rough edges of Mark's choppy Greek. Matthew tends to simplify the language and Luke makes it read better stylistically. At other times, however, Matthew and Luke—especially Matthew—reproduce Mark's language verbatim.

In light of these points, we can confidently claim that Matthew and Luke had access to at least part of what Mark had already written. It appears that Mark not only wrote the first Gospel and contributed to the others, but he also invented the Gospel format.

headline news

Lesson 1

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Mark 11:9

Throughout the ages, human beings have probably given more time and attention to questioning God's existence than to any other concern. Most people believe, both now and throughout history, that there is a divine Being out there – somewhere – watching over us. To announce that God exists is not particularly breaking news.

But claiming that God is here, right now, right next to us – that is big news. Again, while many believe there is a God, fewer accept His role in their lives. Humans often ask of God: *Does He care about us? Pay attention to us? Torture us?* In his gospel, Mark answers those questions by introducing us to Jesus Christ. There is a God, and He does more than just watch over us. Mark gives us the opportunity to meet Him, to get to know Him, and to rely on Him completely. This is the sort of headline news that changes lives.

1 Before you dive into your study of the gospel of Mark, read it. First, read it as though it is a novel—give it your full attention and don't stop until you finish the book. Then go back and skim it and use the space below to jot down the following:

Your first impressions

Repeated words or phrases

General themes

What you discover about Jesus

Your favorite character. Least favorite

Your favorite miracle

Your own explanation of one parable

Christ. This comes from the Greek word *christos*, which means “anointed one.” It’s a translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, which means “Messiah.” In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were anointed with oil as a sign of spiritual authority. The oil represented the Spirit of God. **fyi**

Son of God. This title was not used in the Old Testament in reference to the coming Messiah. Instead it referred to the people of Israel or the king of Israel. It inferred ideas both of being chosen (like God’s people) and of deserving obedience (like a king). Once Jesus arrived on the scene, it started being used for the Messiah. **fyi**

2 What do Mark’s first words (1:1) imply his gospel will be about?

3 What do Jesus’ first words in Mark suggest will be the main theme of His preaching (1:15)?

live

4 What resonated with you most as you read through this book? Explain why.

5 Write down some things you'd like to learn from this twelve-week study, and how you would like your life to be changed by it.

connect

In your group, talk with each other about your first impressions of Mark. What connected most with you? How did you react to Jesus' teachings? Did reading Mark change your perspectives about the Bible or Jesus? Explain.

go deeper

Choose one of the key ideas you found while reading through Mark, and pray that God will give you wisdom to help you apply it to your life in the weeks to come. Write some of those specific prayers below,

Memory Verse of the Week

Did a particular verse make you think? Is there a verse you can't get out of your head? Write it down and memorize it. Allow God's Word to permanently brand itself in your head and your heart.

notes from group discussion